

An Exploration in Lifelong Learning: Attaining a Masters Degree Online

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During my 28 year career in education, I have worked exclusively in the field of educational technology. I began my career in the Edgewood Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas, in 1979 as a Computer Specialist, handling every chore from purchasing and setting up computers to programming and user training. In those early days, all of us in educational technology were trailblazers, and I am proud to say we demonstrated that instructional technology could improve teaching and learning. For the past 14 years, I have been the Director of Technology for La Vernia ISD in La Vernia, Texas, and a very active participant in the transformation of instruction enabled by widespread wired and wireless networking, the Internet, portable technologies and distance education, not to mention the exponential growth in the capabilities and capacities of computers and servers.

While many of my peers might feel that I reached the pinnacle of educational technology leadership by becoming a technology director in a growing district, I realized that the fact that I had never attained a degree in education was inhibiting my growth as an instructional leader. Therefore, when the opportunity arose to obtain an affordable Masters of Education degree from a university as prestigious and rigorous as Lamar, I jumped at the chance, and began my quest as a lifelong learner to obtain a Masters of Education in Educational Technology Leadership. I was especially attracted to this opportunity as the degree is obtained *solely* through distance education; I have always been a proponent of online learning and distance education, and saw this opportunity as a chance to extensively experience the online learning environment firsthand while serving as a mentor and model for my peers. This treatise documents my journey through the Lamar Masters Online program, detailing what I have accomplished because of the program,

what I hope to accomplish with my new knowledge, and how I have been transformed by the experience.

### **Goals**

#### **Position**

I currently hold the position of Director of Technology in La Vernia ISD, a rapidly-growing 3A district located southeast of San Antonio, Texas. In our district as it exists today, I hold the highest position a technology officer can attain. My aspiration, whether through continued growth in La Vernia ISD or perhaps in another district, is to attain the position of Chief Technology Officer (CTO), overseeing directors of both instructional technology and management information systems. From the higher position of CTO, with directors under me to handle the day-to-day operational and managerial challenges, I would be able to concentrate on leadership, setting direction and creating policies with the potential to more profoundly influence and improve instruction throughout the district and the community. As a CTO I would also be able to work more closely with program directors, principals and teachers, and would enjoy mentoring them and sharing best practices to improve teaching and learning.

#### **Leadership**

As a leader, I have always wanted to improve teaching and learning by being able to authoritatively design and implement research-based strategies to increase the integration and implementation of instructional technology. In fact, my primary motivation for seeking a Masters of Education was to become a better instructional leader for the teachers and administrators in La Vernia ISD, able to draw on a wealth of new knowledge regarding research-based best practices backed by a thorough understanding of educational principles. As my previous degree was a BBA concentrating on Management Information Systems, I always felt

somewhat at a loss when discussing education-specific topics such as learning styles. My learning from the degree program thus far has already substantially improved my ability to relate to and understand the needs of the teachers and students in my district.

Based on firsthand experiences during the early days of instructional technology in Edgewood ISD, I saw that the appropriate application of classroom technology improved learning and changed the lives of the students. When I implemented classroom computing for both remedial and enrichment use with the Title I Migrant students in Edgewood, I witnessed firsthand how students are drawn in by the technology, and how quickly their learning, and particularly their reading skills, improved. While I truly enjoyed working directly in the classroom with the teachers and students, I realized that attitudes regarding instructional technology needed to be changed, that administrators and teachers must see computers as more than just tutors and “electronic babysitters”. That realization marked the beginning of my quest to become a technology leader, to attain a position from which I could more broadly influence and improve instruction.

My quest to become a technology leader was also influenced by a lifelong love of technology. My father was a salesman for companies that sold a large array of electronic equipment including personal electronics and televisions, so the best technology of the 1960’s was present throughout my home. Even my favorite toys, electric trains, were technological in nature, so I grew up familiar with and curious about technology in every form. By the time I was in middle school, the crude computers of the day caught my eye, and I began to build homemade circuits capable of performing basic mathematical calculations. When I entered high school, I played with computer terminals at a nearby university, purchased my first programmable calculator, and eventually bought a Radio Shack Model 1 computer.

Two events during high school particularly heightened my desire to become an educator and a technology leader; first, I fought for (and obtained) permission to use my TI-58 programmable calculator in my math classes, leading me to realize that students needed advocates for instructional technology at all levels. Second, a Computer Marathon was held at my high school (Holy Cross of San Antonio) during my senior year in an attempt to get into the Guinness Book of World Records for holding the longest continuous computer programming training session on record. During this marathon, I taught fellow students how to program in BASIC, fostering my desire to teach using technology and to help students to understand the benefits of using computer technology. In a happy coincidence, Edgewood ISD's Director of Federal Programs and their Title I Director visited Holy Cross during the marathon, and talked with me at length regarding computers in schools. That summer, after graduating from Holy Cross, I received a call from Edgewood offering me a position as the District's first Title I Computer Specialist.

Throughout my 14 years in La Vernia ISD, I improved teaching and learning as I brought in the first campus-wide networks and Internet access in the District's history. I led the push to integrate technology into instruction, and demonstrated how technology could improve learning for students. As I continue to lead, I know that teaching and learning in La Vernia ISD will further improve as I implement technology-infused projects based not only on a thorough understanding of technology, but also on my newfound understanding of instructional methodology and research-based best practices. Based on the knowledge I have gained throughout my Masters program, I am now equipped to lead as an *educator*, with the ability to research, analyze and implement technology initiatives targeting school improvement.

A final way that I will lead school improvement while transferring the knowledge I have attained throughout this degree lies in my ongoing role as a grant writer. During my years in La Vernia ISD, I authored or coauthored a total of nine grants implementing instructional technology and distance learning, seven of which were awarded. I always designed the technology and basic instructional components in these grants, but sought assistance when designing the advanced instructional components and rubrics. My early learning in this degree program (particularly in EDLD 5306) enabled me to design *all* the research-based instructional components and rubrics in the recent collaborative Target Tech in Texas (T3) Grant I co-wrote, and will allow me to act as both a technology leader *and* an instructional leader on future grant writing teams targeting school improvement through innovative applications of instructional technology.

### **Vision of Educational Technology**

Williamson and Redish (2009) really elucidate the primary reason I became a technology leader, and the reason I seek to improve my abilities as leader, by stating that “In an era when the needs of students are rapidly changing, schools are not providing digital-age learners with the types of environments that parallel the connectivity and social interaction patterns that they are accustomed to outside of school” (p. 57). They further assert that “This disparity threatens to alienate youth further and encourage the already growing student perceptions that schools are outdated and irrelevant to their interests and goals” (p. 57), directly reinforcing my goal to attain a higher position such as CTO from which I can concentrate on instructional technology leadership, setting a direction and creating policies that utilize technology to increase both the relevance and rigor of instruction.

It is only through increasing my knowledge of instructional methodologies, research-based technology best practices and educational leadership strategies that I can achieve my position and leadership goals; to this end I began my exploration in lifelong learning by seeking a Masters of Education in Educational Technology Leadership. I have a personal vision of educational technology in which every student has access to what they need, anytime and anywhere, to become engaged, active, lifelong participants in their own learning, reaching their full potential; and every teacher has the knowledge, skills and tools to educate and support our students during their quest. I know this vision can be achieved, and I want to be the educational technology leader guiding La Vernia ISD as we realize this vision.

My personal vision of educational technology aligns closely with the views articulated in the *2010 Horizon Report: K-12 Edition* (Johnson, Smith, Levine & Haywood, 2010). Realizing the potential fiscal and monetary benefits offered by cloud computing, I spearheaded the La Vernia ISD Cloud Computing Initiative in early 2009 and began the push to virtualize desktops, servers and storage resources in preparation for cloud-based resource deployment. This initiative built upon the previous Thin Client Computing Initiative I launched in 2007, designed to free the District from the endless and expensive end-user computer upgrade cycle. Concentrating the majority of our District technology funding and resources into a centralized, virtual architecture ideally built upon the robust, private fiber-optic network I crafted through the years, linking all our campuses and offices and letting us make the most of a tight technology budget.

My personal vision of education technology trumpets the increasing importance and relevance of both distance education and online learning for students, going back to my early years in La Vernia ISD a decade ago when I began writing grants to bring in distance learning equipment and online learning opportunities. This vision is supported by *The 2010 Horizon*

*Report*; “Traditionally, a learning environment has been a physical space, but the idea of what constitutes a learning environment is changing. The ‘spaces’ where students learn are becoming more community-driven, interdisciplinary, and supported by technologies that engage virtual communication and collaboration” (Johnson et al., 2010, p. 4).

We must change both our views and our policies if we are to realize the potential of technology-enhanced education. Prensky (2005) states that “Our students are no longer ‘little versions of us,’ as they may have been in the past. In fact, they are so different from us that we can no longer use either our 20<sup>th</sup> century knowledge or our training as a guide to what is best for them educationally” (p. 8). This position is counter-intuitive for both parents and teachers; there is a strong tendency to believe that “what was good enough for us is good enough for our kids” or that “these kids need to spend more time with books and less time playing video games”. Through extensive collaboration with supportive and visionary District and campus leaders, I am proud to say that La Vernia ISD’s innovative technology usage policies support student use of collaborative Web 2.0 tools in the classroom and beyond, guiding us as we strive to change hearts and minds regarding the usefulness and efficacy of non-traditional social media tools, online collaborative learning and portable digital technologies.

Based on the vision of educational technology as described by Johnson et al., (2010), cloud computing and collaborative environments are one year or less to adoption; under my leadership and vision La Vernia ISD has implemented these technologies, so we are practicing users of these technologies and ahead of the curve. Mobile technologies including iPods, handheld and portable computing devices and smart phones are in use by students in many classrooms and disciplines in La Vernia ISD, taking advantage of our advanced Meru 802.11n



wireless Ethernet network well ahead of the two-to-three year adoption date postulated by *The 2010 Horizon Report* (Johnson et al., 2010).

I championed the need for robust, District-wide, next-generation wireless over two years ago in support of my personal vision of student learning taking place anywhere on whatever portable device might be available. Therefore, La Vernia ISD is in an ideal position to support the flexible display technology, including paper or plastic-based, roll up, wireless display and computing devices that *The 2010 Horizon Report* projects to be four to five years out (Johnson et al., 2010).

Technology advances at an ever-increasing rate, as do the technology skills and habits of our students, but our educational system and our schools continue to lag behind. Many of our instructional practices have not changed since I was a child, yet these practices are ineffective and anachronistic for modern digital-age children. Our students today are “Digital Natives”, born and raised into a fully digital world, free of the constraints and customs of the “old world” (Prensky, 2005). I will continue to use my personal vision of educational technology, buoyed by my new learning, to guide me as an instructional leader as I attempt to transform instruction for our digital-native students while advancing District and campus improvement goals.

## **Understanding**

### **What I Learned About Myself**

The most important fact I learned about myself is that I thrive in the online learning environment, and that I enjoy it to the point that I would seek online learning experiences to the exclusion of traditional classroom learning. I have always been a self-paced, independent learner, and often dealt with boredom and frustration in traditional classes as I waited for my peers to catch up and for instruction to proceed. The pure online environment of the Lamar

Masters Online Program, therefore, really fit my learning style and independent nature well; I was able to complete assignments at my own pace, working on my own timetable while accommodating a hectic work schedule. Interaction with colleagues and professors through the discussion boards, videoconferences, interactive documents and email provided an authentic learning community experience, replete with camaraderie, despite a complete lack of physical interaction.

Time management is critical in a program such as this, and I discovered that my past grant writing experience honed my time management and scheduling skills. The time saved on commuting and traversing a large campus is a major bonus to a busy professional like me, and the rigor and relevance of the program has prepared me well for the next stage of my life and career.

As I continue my exploration in lifelong learning, I will endeavor to take additional courses of study through online venues whenever possible. An added enabler stems from the lack of operational costs associated with traditional brick-and-mortar settings, making online learning more affordable and removing a major barrier to my continuing education.

### **What I Learned About My Technology and Leadership Skills**

Having been an educational technology leader for years, I knew that I could lead technology innovation from a technical standpoint. Thanks to my degree program, however, I learned that I can now lead technology innovation from an instructional standpoint as well, and I am enjoying my newfound abilities as an instructional leader. My instructional leadership skills were sharpened as I interacted with my classmates, professors and coaches through the discussion boards and collaborative projects. I really began to take a personal interest in helping my colleagues and classmates learn, not just about technology, but especially about educational

and instructional practices. It made me feel good when I could help a classmate by sharing my knowledge and ideas with them, and the discussion board played an important role in the development of my instructional leadership skills.

As my education progressed, I learned that a leader cannot lead if no one follows him; there is an art to leading skillfully. Learning the appropriate tools and methods for building consensus was an invaluable experience. My Research class presented the concept of action research, in which a leader examines relevant findings and combines them with unique situational data in order to answer a question, synergistically formulating a research-based action plan. The action research concept presented an elegant answer to that age-old question of “Why should we follow you?”

I also learned that it is my duty as an educational leader to vanguard my colleagues and peers in efforts to improve instruction for all our students through the appropriate application of educational technology. Starting with my Concepts of Educational Technology course, I became driven to spread the word regarding digital native learning styles and the curricular and instructional changes we must undertake in our schools to meet the unique needs of these learners. When the opportunity arose, I leveraged the knowledge gained from all my courses to create and proffer a series of multimedia presentations, entitled Digital Native Learning Styles, during the 2010 Education Service Center, Region 20 Tech Fiesta, a TCEA-affiliated regional educational technology conference.

As an educational technology leader, spearheading the charge to update our instructional technology policies and educational practices to meet the needs of our digital native students will be essential to the ultimate realization of La Vernia ISD’s learning goals, furthering campus and District improvement initiatives.

**What I Learned About My Attitudes**

As I began the degree program, my initial attitude was that I knew about technology and just needed to learn about instructional practices and methodologies. To my surprise, while I did have an excellent grasp of how instructional technology worked and what it could accomplish, I did not understand the profoundly different manner in which our digital native students use the Internet and learn with technology. My attitude used to be that whenever a student violated our acceptable usage policies, the best punishment was to deny them access to technology for a period of time commensurate with the severity of their violation. I now realize that this would have been the equivalent during my school days to a student drawing a lewd picture and being punished by having their pens, pencils and paper taken away; how would they learn? My new attitude is that while technology usage violations and other technology infractions must be punished, they should be handled like any other discipline infraction, and access rights should be taken away only long enough for an investigation to be completed and documentation gathered.

My attitude towards the instructional use of video games also changed profoundly as I advanced through my courses. While I knew that video games heightened hand-to-eye coordination, developed reflexes, and made use of problem-solving skills, I did not consider them to be tools for learning. My horizons were expanded as I began to understand that video games engage students as they interact with technology, and these games develop students' higher-order thinking skills. Games may soon enable advanced multi-disciplinary concepts to be presented through direct interaction in a manner that no other classroom experience can convey. Gee (2003) contrasts the engaging nature of learning in a video game with traditional classroom learning as he notes that "So here we have something [learning a video game] that is long, hard and challenging. However, you cannot play a game if you cannot learn it... Of course,

designers could keep making the games shorter and simpler to facilitate learning. That's often what schools do. But no, game designers keep making the games longer and more challenging (and introduce new things in new ones), and still manage to get them learned" (p. 6). I am now a proponent of using video games in instruction as they offer a fast-paced, challenging, interactive environment that keeps modern digital natives engaged and motivated as they learn and explore; my new viewpoint is representative of a more open attitude to non-traditional learning through technology that I gained throughout my course of studies.

In the final analysis, my new learning really developed my "inner educator", equipping me with a confidence of attitude born from a deeper understanding of what it means to be an educator and a leader. I always considered myself more of a "techie" than an educator, despite the fact that I taught community college classes and co-taught high school network maintenance classes. Lacking academic familiarity with instructional strategies and learning models, I used to feel inferior when discussing pedagogy with my teachers, much as they might feel inferior discussing advanced technology concepts with me. Throughout this degree program, however, I took advantage of every opportunity to increase my knowledge of learning theories, instructional practices and pedagogy, and I can now display a confident and competent attitude when discussing educational practices as they relate to the implementation of instructional technology.

### **Most Beneficial Courses**

While I benefitted from every course throughout my Lamar Masters of Education degree program, there were six courses that I consider to be the most beneficial in equipping me as an educational leader while transforming my views of both instruction and instructional technology.

These courses enhanced my practice as a technology director and leader; the skills and knowledge I attained have already afforded significant benefit to the teachers and students of La

Vernia ISD, and I can honestly say that these courses changed my life. I will reflect upon each course in course-number sequence, not necessarily in the order in which I encountered these courses during my degree program.

### **EDLD 5301 Research**

Research made my list of most beneficial courses for multiple reasons, but especially because it was in this class that I was introduced to the concept of action research. Before this class began, I thought I knew a lot about how to find credible, authoritative sources when performing research. What I learned is that research is not just about finding valid answers; research is about convincing an audience why a particular course of action is right and reasonable, and also about addressing our “wonderings”, those “what if” questions that we all have as practicing educators. Action research describes the process in which educators as practitioners perform research to answer a wondering, and then combine that research with unique situational data to create a synergistic solution that goes beyond just applying the findings of research. Action research is unique because it is performed by practicing educators immersed in the situation, as opposed to research performed by clinicians or academicians to solve big-picture questions in a controlled environment.

Research was a very beneficial class as it introduced me to many tools and models for building consensus and for leading committees in the search to find an appropriate course of action. I am already employing the Delphi Method, which uses moderated question and answer protocols so that a group never knows who asked a question or provided an answer, to overcome any potential political or personal influence among members on my Instructional Software Committee (ISC). The ISC is one of my Internship projects that utilizes action research to

determine whether our current instructional software is instructionally and technologically appropriate, and whether or not a better instructional solution is available.

I made use of another tool I discovered during the Research class, Force Field Analysis, to determine the potential driving and resistive forces, and the ultimate feasibility, of my primary Internship project; this project utilizes Server and Desktop Virtualization to provide a consistent e-learning environment, available from any computer at any time, to special needs students in order to enhance the delivery of differentiated and targeted instruction.

Like all of my classes, this class helped me to master International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for performance by educational technology facilitators. My Research class equipped me with the tools and knowledge essential to meet standard on ISTE's Technology Facilitator Performance Task TF-V.C.6, requiring me to select appropriate tools for communicating concepts, conducting research, and solving problems for an intended audience and purpose, and on Performance Task TF-II.B.1, requiring me to assist teachers as they apply current research on teaching and learning with technology when planning learning environments and experiences.

### **EDLD 5306 Fundamentals of Educational Technology**

Fundamentals of Educational Technology had a significant impact early on, and it was my first course in this degree program. The class really opened my eyes as it presented the concept of our students as digital natives, children born into a digital, networked world, while characterizing my generation as digital immigrants, newcomers to this digital world who are forever stuck with an "accent" caused by our "old world", non-technological learning processes and thought patterns; we are therefore unable to see the world as our students do. This concept revolutionized my thinking about all aspects of instructional technology and technology

integration, and led to my immediate realization that my practice of disciplining children who had violated technology acceptable use policies by revoking their access to technology for extended periods of time was potentially crippling these students' ability to learn. I have since not only revised my views and recommendations, but have become an evangelist to discipline technology-related infractions no differently than we would handle fighting or any other behavior-related issue.

Fundamentals of Educational Technology also presented the concept that our modern digital natives have different ways of learning and interacting, and that these students are so different from us that even traditional concepts such as the "3-Rs" are being transformed into the new "4-Es". According to Armstrong and Warlick (2004), "Whether we like it or not, with the information age comes a whole new set of basic skills... The traditional 3-Rs, naturally and out of necessity, evolve into 4-Es to define literacy in an increasingly, and soon to be exclusively, digital and networked world" (p. 20). This concept led me to realize the importance of my becoming an *educational* leader, as I am in a unique position to introduce these concepts, particularly the critical 4-Es concept of Ethics, to my teachers, helping them improve instruction for our students while supporting campus and District improvement initiatives.

EDLD 5306 influenced my thinking so profoundly that it formed the basis of a Target Tech in Texas (T3) grant that I co-authored; while the grant was not awarded, the research and instructional design components were lauded by the reviewers, and I am proud to say that the instructional design and research basis was all based upon the knowledge and research skills I attained in this class. This class also formed the basis of a multimedia presentation, entitled Digital Native Learning Styles, that I produced and presented for the Region 20 Education Service Center's Tech Fiesta in April of 2010; this presentation was a natural way for me to



evangelize the unique needs and learning styles of our digital native students to schools and districts throughout our entire region, advocating that schools should permit the use of digital native tools including iPods and smart phones in the classroom.

The Fundamentals of Educational Technology class clearly helped me reach an accomplished skill level on ISTE Standard TF-I, Technology Operations and Concepts, particularly regarding Performance Indicator TF-I.B requiring technology facilitators to demonstrate continual growth in their technology knowledge and skills to stay abreast of both current and emerging technologies.

### **EDLD 5363 Multimedia and Video Technology**

My Multimedia and Video Technology class was unique as it let me express myself creatively through multimedia while learning how to properly produce video and multimedia designed to communicate on multiple levels with an audience, and it was therefore my most enjoyable class.

Our first assignment required the use of multimedia including photos, animation and recorded narration to produce a digital personal story, using the medium to express something factual and personal to our audience. I really got into this assignment, and produced a digital story entitled “Tracks to the Future, Ties to the Past” that told the story of the role that trains, both real and toy, have played throughout my life, and how for me trains still tie me to my family and to our love for each other. I attempted to convey emotion and really touch the audience through this presentation, and it has been gratifying to receive positive feedback from my professors and colleagues at Lamar as well as from my peers in La Vernia ISD, where my project now serves as a model for the potential of digital storytelling in instruction. This assignment was key in demonstrating the power of media production to educate and expand the horizons of the

learner; Garrison (1999) explains that “Media production engages and excites; it leads to unexpected discoveries, increased self-awareness and esteem, sharpened critical thinking, analytical skills, group work skills, and ability to communicate ideas” (p. 1).

Although I had already used the Audacity software extensively for modifying and filtering audio recordings at school, I had never used it to create a podcast. The experience I gained in Multimedia and Video Technology with producing storyboards, scripts, and both audio and video podcasts will serve me well as I model these techniques for my teachers. LVISD currently has several teachers who want to use podcasts in instruction, and I can mentor them and model instructional strategies thanks to the knowledge I gained during this course.

Finally, the group Public Service Announcement (PSA) project was the capstone in this class, and was a very valuable experience as I learned much regarding methods to support each group member and make them and their work shine even when they fell short of expectation. The hands-on experience I acquired in mixing audio from multiple narrators, and using Dropbox.com as a cloud-based file sharing and storage repository, pales in comparison to the valuable awareness I gained that true collaboration means amplification, connecting everyone involved and their work in a non-judgmental way that ultimately improves the project and increases the value of each team member’s contribution, and the value of the team itself, synergistically. Collaboration is an essential art for me to model as an educational leader; Solomon and Schrum (2007) explain that “The old way of doing things is presentation-driven; information is delivered and tested.”, and emphasize that “The new way is collaborative, with information shared, discussed, refined with others, and understood deeply” (p. 20).

Multimedia and Video Technology helped me master ISTE Performance Indicator TF-V.C, particularly regarding Performance Task TF-V.C.2, calling for me to assist others in

locating, selecting, capturing, and integrating video and digital images in varying formats for use in presentations, publications, and other products.

### **EDLD 5364 Teaching with Technology**

Teaching with Technology stands out, as it was during this class that I gained my first exposure to and extensive experience with Google Docs, a Web 2.0 collaborative tool that I now use in my daily practice and model for my colleagues in La Vernia ISD. Throughout this class, we used Google Docs for asynchronous collaboration and project development with group members who were geographically non-contiguous, and I saw firsthand the benefits of using a single interactive online document that was always up-to-date, eliminating both the tedious emailing of various copies of a document and the omnipresent concern over whether or not we had the latest copy from which to work. I made extensive use of Google Docs in my Internship projects, and will continue to use it as the basis for all future collaboration in my practice as Director of Technology. At the District level, LVISD is now using Google Calendar administratively, and is moving towards integration of Google Docs as the platform of choice for both administrative and instructional use; I have demonstrated the benefits of various aspects of this tool to colleagues on the Leadership Team during my “Tech Bytes” ten-minute, mini-inservice-training sessions offered periodically during our scheduled Leadership Team meetings.

It was also in Teaching with Technology that I was exposed to the CAST UDL Book Builder, an online Web 2.0 authoring tool that allows teachers to quickly and easily create online multimedia lessons, or “books”, that use differentiated instruction strategies to address multiple learning styles. Previous instructional authoring systems I had used were tedious to learn and temperamental to use, and required extensive technology skills in order to import and properly format the media files. UDL Book Builder is simple enough that any teacher could learn to use

it in just a few hours, improving their practice while supporting customized, differentiated multimedia instruction for their students. I hope to present an inservice session on the use of this great tool during an upcoming staff development day.

As a final bonus, it was during my Teaching with Technology class that I created and posted my first YouTube video as a part of the group project; I never had a YouTube account before, but I now regularly use this Web 2.0 tool both for posting my own work as well as for finding content to include in presentations and staff development sessions.

The skills I acquired in Teaching with Technology helped me master ISTE Standard TF-II, Planning and Designing Learning Environments and Experiences, in which technology facilitators are expected to plan, design, and model effective learning environments and multiple experiences supported by technology.

### **EDLD 5365/5388 Web Design and Development**

Web Design and Development was a class that I had highly anticipated as the District website is under my charge as Director of Technology, and I was anxious to learn more about the instructional and supportive potential for the LVISD web site. Our web site will soon undergo a redesign, and I will be sure to incorporate many of the interactive features I learned about in this class, including surveys, parent and student portals, wikis, blogs and other social media, as well as support for online learning through podcasting. These are essential tools for our teachers to use and for our students to access; according to Rhoades (2009) “Today's faculty members (elementary through college) are using podcasts, wikis, chat rooms, online curricula and virtual realities to help students become successful in the classroom” (p. 24).

Great value was added to Web Design and Development due to the focus on the required supporting policies and guiding documents that direct both website development and web

publishing by contributors. The policies I developed during this class are essential tools to make sure that all content on the web site presents a consistent look and feel, follows content style guidelines, presents consistent navigation capabilities, and above all communicates a message consistent with campus and District goals. These policies ensure that the site remains well documented as it is developed and updated; without firm policy support, websites can easily become disorganized and inconsistent as time goes on and different hands take turns with web posting duties, making it difficult to find information.

Website navigation is a critical component of website design that I could easily have downplayed before taking this class; as I learned, however, you can have the most relevant content available, but if your audience cannot find it, it does you no good. As different people may find one navigational method more appealing than another, Kaiser (2006) reminds us that “If it is to be most helpful to your visitors, your web site will probably need to incorporate a combination of navigation types” (p. 119).

The open-source tools I was introduced to throughout this class, including HTML and WYSIWYG editors such as the Amaya combination browser and authoring tool and the Picasa image editing tool, gave me practical hands-on experience in coding and designing web pages. Producing specifications for web page development, coupled with the planning and interaction with the simulated web hosting service, delivered an authentic experience in designing the feature set and coding of a modern website. As mentioned, I am currently spearheading a redesign of the LVISD website, and I am focusing on web hosting and service providers that include the ability to support AJAX for both ease of coding and fast web page redraw, and MySQL as a database back-end to website content, just as our simulated web service provider in

our assignments offered. I am better prepared for this mission thanks to the real-world scenarios and learning experiences embedded in my Web Design and Development assignments.

Web Design and Development played an essential role in assuring that I can meet standard on ISTE Technology Facilitator Performance Task TF-V.D.4, requiring technology facilitators to design and maintain web pages and sites that support communication between the school and community.

### **EDLD 5366 Digital Graphics**

Digital Graphics was essential to the advancement of my communications style. As a Director of Technology, I have always produced documents, flyers and presentations for communicating with colleagues, students and community members, but thanks to EDLD 5366 I now view this communication in a new light.

Essential layout concepts for graphic design covered in EDLD 5366 included the Rule of Thirds and the Golden Ratio; these concepts relate primarily to the balance, or symmetry, of objects and the overall consistency and appeal of the graphics, and can play a major role in the success or failure of graphically-based communication. I learned the four basic but essential elements of graphic design, Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity. Proximity really grabbed my attention, as it relates so critically to understanding and interpreting information presented visually; as Williams (2008) cautions us, “Items or groups of information that are *not* related to each other should *not* be in close proximity (nearness) to the other elements, which gives the reader an instant visual clue to the organization and content of the page” (p. 15).

All of these graphics concepts are essential to branding efforts, another new concept I discovered in this class. I had never thought of trying to develop a brand or logo that would consistently tie communication to me or to my department, but after developing a departmental

brand and logo during this course, I now use it whenever the opportunity arises to create a consistent image and identification in the mind of my audience.

The work performed in Digital Graphics on the newsletter project really helped me think about communications and gave direction to my efforts to regularly communicate with staff and teachers in an online format. While I have yet to undertake a printed, illustrated newsletter as I developed during this class due to time constraints, I have started an LVISD Technology Blog and apply all the graphic concepts I learned during EDLD 5366; I am working towards transforming the blog into an online journal that more closely resembles “The Wire”, the technology newsletter that I produced in class as my final project.

An unexpected benefit from my Digital Graphics class took place during a class assignment to create an avatar and navigate Second Life, an online virtual reality simulation. Second Life gave me experience in online interaction in a virtual world through telepresence, providing an ideal example for a potential virtual classroom of tomorrow. Additionally, Second Life helped me to see the instructional use of video games in a new light; I previously viewed gaming as a distraction to instruction, but now understand that the skills learned through video gaming are applicable in the real world, and that higher-order thinking skills and collaboration are employed in video gaming at levels difficult to duplicate through any other medium.

Digital Graphics helped me meet standard on multiple ISTE Technology Facilitator Standards and Indicators, but especially on Performance Task TF-V.C.1, calling for me to model the advanced features of word processing, desktop publishing, graphics programs, and utilities in order to assist my colleagues in developing professional products.

In the final analysis, all six of these courses provided essential concepts and skills enabling me to grow as an educator and as a leader, while helping me to meet standard under

multiple ISTE Technology Facilitator Standards. Each day I apply the knowledge and skills that I acquired in these courses, and the foundation laid by these courses has set me well on the road to continuous lifelong learning as an educator practitioner.

### **Reflections on My Overall Degree Program**

Overall, this degree program truly changed my life. I have always been a technology leader who has worked in education, but thanks to my new learning, I have been transformed into an educational leader. During a recent Leadership Team meeting, I actively participated in a discussion regarding instructional methodologies with a confidence and level of understanding that would have been impossible without the knowledge I gained throughout my studies. I am even contemplating serving on the La Vernia ISD Assessment Committee, as the extensive firsthand experience I gained in this program with both performance-based and project-based assessment sparked a desire in me to become personally involved as we seek to improve teaching and learning by increasing the relevance and authenticity of student assessment.

A key benefit of the knowledge I have acquired is that I now examine situations and the people involved in them more critically to develop a deeper understanding of the context; I pay careful attention to both quantitative and qualitative factors when analyzing circumstances, and to the actions, and reactions, of those involved. Harris, Edmonson and Combs (2010) explain that “To understand what a person does and why, the leader has to know and understand things that are personal to that individual. Often, situations are not what they appear to be on the surface...” (p. 37). My new stance serves as evidence of my transformation to an educational leader, as I have moved from being driven primarily by quantitative facts to being propelled by a more balanced world view including qualitative and contextual factors.



Throughout my entire degree program, there have been many valuable experiences and interactions that have shaped me as an educational technology leader. However, I believe one of the most beneficial aspects of the program has been my connection with my classmates and professors through the discussion boards, during videoconferences, and through collaborative online experiences including Google Docs, wikis, and the virtual landscape of Second Life. While all of the course content was valuable, I developed a deeper understanding of the role of leadership and of challenging curriculum concepts by interacting with others and sharing thoughts and experiences. Many times my understanding of a topic changed or was enhanced by the reflections and questions of my colleagues, and my world view expanded as I was exposed to the passions, viewpoints and knowledge of others.

A reflection on my overall degree program would not be complete without considering the final capstone course, EDLD 5370 Internship. This class was grueling due to both the amount of work involved and the timing, as it coincided with the hectic fall school schedule, but there was great benefit afforded through this course. In concert with the Internship Field-based Activities, this class ensures that graduates have the skills, knowledge and demonstrated abilities necessary to succeed as educational technology leaders.

As a practicing Director of Technology in La Vernia ISD, my experience during the Internship Field-based Activities was different than it is likely to be for the typical educator completing this degree program. As I perform technology leadership tasks daily, the track that my Internship Mentor, Superintendent Dr. Tom Harvey and I elected to take was to examine each task through new eyes, viewing it from the instructional perspective while correlating it to the pertinent ISTE Technology Facilitator Standards and Performance Indicators. Although I was previously familiar with the ISTE Standards for Technology Facilitators, it was very

beneficial to use these benchmarks to assess my progress and performance from the perspective of an educational technology facilitator, ensuring that I provide essential educational leadership to my teachers while furnishing technological leadership during the execution of my duties.

Finally, my two Internship Projects, forming and leading the Instructional Software Committee and launching the Special Education Virtualization and Virtual Desktop Project, allowed me to practice action research, use consensus building tools and deploy change management strategies under the guidance of my Mentor, who has extensive educational technology and leadership experience. This mentorship role will continue as these projects mature and bear fruit, and this experience strengthened our relationship while building my confidence as a leader and educator.

As I complete this comprehensive examination of my learning throughout my Lamar University Masters of Education degree program, I am at the finish line of my course of studies, and commencement looms ever closer on the horizon. However, as a lifelong learner, in many ways I am just approaching the starting line. I pursued this course of studies to improve my abilities as an educational leader, and it is now time to get to work building a new future at La Vernia ISD. My new learning changed the way I view every task I perform as Director of Technology, and I am anxious to apply this new knowledge in support of campus and District improvement goals. I will continue to utilize action research to expand my knowledge, and seek answers to questions yet to be asked. Continued learning and professional development will be essential to my unending exploration in lifelong learning, so I conclude this chapter of my knowledge quest with a three-year professional development plan. I have also included a copy of my curriculum vitae as an appendix, documenting my professional experiences thus far. My adventure is just beginning...

### Three-Year Personal Professional Development Plan

My three-year professional development plan must address two separate ISTE Technology Facilitator Standards that are essential to my growth as an educational technology leader. First, under Standard TF-I, Technology Operations and Concepts, I must address Performance Indicator TF-I.B, requiring that I demonstrate continual growth in technology knowledge and skills, and stay abreast of both current and emerging technologies, in order to maintain my expertise. Second, under Standard TF-V, Productivity and Professional Practice, Performance Indicator TF-V.A calls for me to use technology resources to engage in ongoing professional development and lifelong learning, while Performance Indicator TF-V.B directs that I continually evaluate and reflect on my professional practice to facilitate making informed decisions regarding the use of technology in support of student learning. Based on this knowledge, I will delineate each year's professional development activities by Standard:

Year	Activities Addressing ISTE Standard TF-I	Activities Addressing ISTE Standard TF-V
2011	<p>Attend 2011 TCEA (Texas Computer Education Association) Conference, focusing on TEC-SIG (Technology Coordinators Special Interest Group) workshops presenting technology and infrastructure trends.</p> <p>Attend bimonthly San Antonio Area Technology Directors meetings.</p> <p>Participate in online training presenting operation and optimization strategies for virtualization using VMware and vSphere.</p>	<p>Attend 2011 TCEA Conference, focusing on workshops presenting strategies for integrating and implementing instructional technology.</p> <p>Attend 2011 Tech Fiesta regional TCEA-affiliated Instructional Technology Fair.</p> <p>Attend summer professional development session(s) on instructional technology topic TBD by LVISD Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Personnel.</p>
2012	<p>Attend 2012 TCEA Conference, focusing on TEC-SIG workshops presenting technology and infrastructure trends.</p> <p>Attend bimonthly San Antonio Area Technology Directors meetings.</p> <p>Participate in online training presenting</p>	<p>Attend 2012 TCEA Conference, focusing on workshops presenting strategies for integrating and implementing instructional technology.</p> <p>Attend 2012 Tech Fiesta regional TCEA-affiliated Instructional Technology Fair.</p>

	advanced virtualization and cloud computing management strategies for VMware and vSphere.	Attend summer professional development session(s) on instructional technology topic TBD by LVISD Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Personnel.
2013	<p>Attend 2013 TCEA Conference, focusing on TEC-SIG workshops presenting technology and infrastructure trends.</p> <p>Attend bimonthly San Antonio Area Technology Directors meetings.</p> <p>Pursue and obtain VCP (VMware Certified Professional) or latest relevant VMware/vSphere certification.</p>	<p>Attend 2013 TCEA Conference, focusing on workshops presenting strategies for integrating and implementing instructional technology.</p> <p>Attend 2013 Tech Fiesta regional TCEA-affiliated Instructional Technology Fair.</p> <p>Attend summer professional development session(s) on instructional technology topic TBD by LVISD Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Personnel.</p>

Reflecting upon the professional development activities and growth path elaborated in my three-year plan, it is clear that the support afforded through membership in key instructional technology organizations would further the attainment of my learning goals. Therefore, in 2011, I will become a member of the Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA), as well as a member of TEC-SIG, TCEA's Technology Coordinators Special Interest Group.

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## Appendix

### Curriculum Vitae

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### **Education**

<u>University:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Degree:</u>
Lamar University	2009-2010	M. Ed. in Educational Technology Leadership
Our Lady of the Lake University	1987-1992	BBA in Computer Information Systems

### **Professional Experience**

Director of Technology and Grants, La Vernia ISD, La Vernia, TX, 1997 through present

- Responsible for design, planning, oversight and management of District-wide business and instructional technology systems; provide network infrastructure design and implementation services including oversight and management of technology vendors and bids; design, implement and manage District-wide and departmental technology budget; supervise District-wide technology support staff; provide discovery, program design, grant writing, grant evaluation and fiscal management services for Federal/State technology grants and multi-District regional grants consortium comprised of public and private schools.

Vice President of Technology, Regency Educational Systems, Kingwood, TX, 1996-1997

- Responsible for design and fiscal management of corporate technology program; responsible for instructional technology systems design, marketing, sales, installation and implementation; provided assistance and support to Texas public and private school clients in acquiring/managing instructional technology including assistance applying for and managing Federal and State grant funding; provided discovery, oversight and management of third-party technology vendors including all aspects of the bidding, hiring and contracting process, and management of all off-site installation and support services.

Education Support Specialist, Regency Educational Systems, Addison, TX, 1995-1996

- Responsible for customer technology systems design, sales, installation and implementation including assistance in acquiring/planning funding and support for Texas

public and private school client base; provided discovery, oversight and management of third-party technology vendors including management of all off-site installation and support services.

Proprietor, ADB Computer Services, San Antonio, TX, 1993-1995

- Sole proprietor of full-time business providing computer sales, installation, consulting and training services, including Systems Engineering services, for customers throughout Texas. Dealt primarily with Texas public and private schools and tax exempt entities.

Continuing Education Instructor, San Antonio College/Alamo Community College District, San Antonio, TX, 1983-1994

- Part-time instructor teaching adult Basic Computer Literacy, BASIC Programming, Word Processing Concepts, WordPerfect Word Processing, Lotus 1-2-3/Microsoft Excel Business Spreadsheet Applications (accounting, bookkeeping and budget management using formulas and functions), Microsoft Windows Basics, Microsoft Office Basics, and Advanced Microsoft Office Applications.

Educational Computer Specialist, Edgewood ISD, San Antonio, TX, 1979-1993

- Responsible for District-level special populations educational computer program instructional design and implementation; provided network infrastructure design and implementation services including bid writing, supervision and management of third-party technology vendors; assisted with fiscal design and management including application submittal for Federal Title 1 Accelerated Learning technology program; assisted with design and application submittal assistance for various technology grant programs; provided technology program design, implementation and fiscal management assistance to all private schools within Edgewood ISD.

### **Teaching Experience**

CAVE (Computer Assistant Vocational Education) Co-teacher, La Vernia High School, La Vernia, TX, 1998-2003

- Served as co-teacher for student technician vocational education class at La Vernia High School; taught networking concepts, network repair and maintenance, computer repair and maintenance, and technical support skills and methodologies to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Continuing Education Instructor, San Antonio College/Alamo Community College District, San Antonio, TX, 1983-1994

- Part-time instructor teaching Basic Computer Literacy, BASIC Programming, Word Processing Concepts, WordPerfect Word Processing, Lotus 1-2-3/Microsoft Excel Business Spreadsheet Applications (accounting, bookkeeping and budget management using formulas and functions), Microsoft Windows Basics, Microsoft Office Basics, and Advanced Microsoft Office Applications to adult Continuing Education students.

### **Presentations**

- Digital Native Learning Styles – presented April, 2010 at Tech Fiesta, Education Service Center, Region 20, San Antonio, TX - regional TCEA-affiliated event
- Acceptable Usage Policies – presented April, 2003 at Tech Fiesta, Education Service Center, Region 20, San Antonio, TX - regional TCEA-affiliated event
- Soliton Wave and Laser Communications Principles – guest lecturer 2001-2003, Holy Cross High School, San Antonio, TX
- Running Windows Under Novell NetWare – presented March, 1998 at TechQuest, La Vernia ISD, La Vernia, TX - regional TCEA-affiliated event
- Regency Mobile Units – Computer Labs on Wheels – presented October, 1998 at Tech Day, Incarnate Word High School, San Antonio, TX - regional TCEA-affiliated event
- Regency Mobile Units – Computer Labs on Wheels – presented February, 1997 at TCEA, Austin, TX

### **Related Professional Experience**

#### **Grants Written, Awarded and Managed:**

- “TR<sup>3</sup>I-Tech (Teaching Rigor, Relevance & Relationships with Immersive Technology) Target Tech in Texas (T3) Grant”; multi-District collaborative including La Vernia ISD, Edgewood ISD in San Antonio, TX, and the private schools within Edgewood; not awarded; amount of application \$999,670
- “TARGET 2 Year 2 VECOT (Virtual Education Classroom of Tomorrow) Grant”; multi-District collaborative including La Vernia ISD, Edgewood ISD in San Antonio, TX, and the private schools within Edgewood; total award \$655,722
- “TARGET 2 Year 1 VECOT (Virtual Education Classroom of Tomorrow) Grant”; multi-District collaborative including La Vernia ISD, Edgewood ISD in San Antonio, TX, and the private schools within Edgewood; total award \$899,991
- “TIE 4 SAVE (Strategies for Accessing Virtual Education) IPTV and Distance Learning Grant”; multi-District collaborative including La Vernia ISD, Edgewood ISD in San Antonio, TX, and the private schools within Edgewood; total award \$985,000
- “Technology Activities in Connection with School Repair and Renovation Grant”; La Vernia ISD; total award \$108,296
- “TIFB PS10 Grant”; La Vernia ISD; total award \$124,661
- “TIFB PS8 Grant”; La Vernia ISD; total award \$199,987
- “TIFB Distance Learning Grant”; La Vernia ISD; total award \$89,750



**Honors and Affiliations**

- Elected Steering Committee “3A” Representative since 1998 in Education Service Center, Region 20 “netVision20” Regional Network Collaborative; representing and voting on behalf of all Class 3A Schools located within the region
- Executive Committee Member since 1998 in Education Service Center, Region 20 “netVision20” Regional Network Collaborative; representing La Vernia ISD
- Member/Listed in 1994/1995 Sterling Who’s Who Directory, Executive Edition
- Member of The Sons of the Republic of Texas
- Member of TCA (Train Collectors Association)